THE DOUBLE BUILDING OF PERMANENCE

Against Ephemeral Architecture: a straw skin over a thousand-year structure

XEMA GATNAU

Proposal for a biennale, festival, or architecture call

Conceptual visualization: one possible compact catenary configuration of the Permanence Hall, approximately 10×10×10 m. Final dimensions remain adaptable to budget, site and structural development.

Abstract

The Double Building of Permanence proposes a material and philosophical critique of ephemeral architecture and of the temporal logic of biennales, festivals and exhibition devices. The project is articulated through two complementary pieces: a 3×3×3 m Thousand-Year Cell and a catenary Permanence Hall with an approximate footprint of 100 m², conceived either in a compact or longitudinal configuration according to budget, site and structural development. Both combine an outer straw skin - renewable and sacrificial - with a concrete and stainless-steel core designed for extreme longevity. This opposition between temporal skin and permanent skeleton turns time itself into a criterion of sustainability and argues that high-impact materials are justified only when they work for generations. The proposal also formulates a paradox for biennale architecture: an ephemeral work reaches its highest success when it fails in its final cause of disappearing and becomes too valuable to dismantle. Against adaptability understood as constant mutation, the project defends maintenance, repairability, stewardship and material continuity. Its ultimate hypothesis is civilizational: if we can no longer build a habitat that aspires to remain for centuries, the problem exceeds architecture and concerns our capacity to continue producing a habitable and transmissible world.

Keywords: ephemeral architecture; permanence; temporal sustainability; long duration; straw; concrete; stainless steel; catenary architecture; repairability; stewardship; biennales; formal cause; final cause.

1. Initial statement

This project begins with a discomfort: contemporary architecture speaks increasingly of sustainability, regeneration, circularity, reuse and the future, yet a significant part of its spaces of prestige - biennales, festivals, pavilions, fairs, exhibitions, installations and temporary devices - continue to operate according to a materially contradictory logic. Seasonal architecture is produced in order to speak about permanence. Structures destined to disappear are assembled in order to speak about sustainability. Immersive experiences about the future are created while the present continues multiplying waste, transport, dismantling, energy consumption and visual gestures with short lives.

The Double Building of Permanence deliberately places itself inside this contradiction. It does not pretend to believe in the biennale as architecture's ultimate destination. On the contrary, it begins with an explicit distrust of the biennale when understood as a machine for novelty, image circulation and temporary cultural consumption.

The project does not come to produce another ephemeral pavilion. It does not come to generate another experience. It does not come to offer a futuristic image of sustainability. It comes to introduce an accusation: if architecture is built in order to disappear, it is justified only when it fails in that end. Only when what was meant to disappear proves that it deserved to remain do the material, energetic and moral means employed begin to be justified.

The general thesis is this:

In ephemeral architecture, only the failure of the end justifies the means.

If the end was to last briefly, to disappear, to be exhausted in the event, then only the failure of that end - only the work becoming too necessary, too useful, too beautiful or too symbolically intense to accept its disappearance - can justify the material, energetic and moral cost of having built it.

Against seasonal architecture, this project does not propose a new ephemeral installation about sustainability. It proposes two minimal, hard and complementary buildings: a 3×3×3 metre cell and a catenary Permanence Hall whose final dimensions are deliberately left open and may adopt a compact or longitudinal configuration depending on budget, site and structural development. Both are conceived as material tests of one idea: time is not a secondary enemy of architecture, but one of its highest criteria of sustainability.

The material innovation of the project is decisive: both buildings are presented externally covered by an exposed straw skin, as if they were fragile, agricultural, temporary constructions destined to decay. But that appearance is a mask. Beneath the straw stands a concrete and stainless-steel structure conceived to last for centuries.

An ephemeral skin over a permanent structure.
An appearance of fragility protecting a will to duration.
A straw mask over a concrete and stainless-steel skeleton.

The building is not ephemeral. It merely wears the mask of the ephemeral in order to accuse ephemeral architecture from within its own visual and ritual language.

2. Personal background and origin of the project

The idea of buildings designed for extreme duration did not arise as a late response to a recent fashion for long-term architecture. Since 2022, before its possible formulation within the context of a biennale or festival, this line of work has existed as a real concern: to build structures whose sustainability depends not only on reducing initial impact, but also on the length of time during which that impact remains justified.

The fundamental idea is simple:

Time is a key factor of sustainability.

A building that consumes materials with a high ecological cost and lasts thirty years may be a form of waste. A building that uses robust materials, requires a significant initial investment and lasts five hundred years may be a form of responsibility. The problem is not only what is used, but for how long it serves. Sustainability cannot be measured only at the moment of construction; it must also be measured through duration, repair, transmission, maintenance and the capacity of a work to continue making sense beyond the generation that produced it.

The project therefore begins from an earlier intuition: against architecture understood as a short-cycle object, an architecture of extremely long cycles must be recovered. Not as historicist nostalgia, but as a material and moral demand. The aim is not to copy cathedrals, monasteries, walls, aqueducts, stone houses or old buildings. It is to learn from something many architectures of the past knew and part of contemporary architecture has forgotten: to build is to introduce duration into the world.

The Double Building of Permanence arises from this conviction: if a civilization is no longer capable of building something intended to last for centuries, its problem is not merely technical. It is civilizational.

3. The double building

The proposal is articulated through two pieces:

1. The Thousand-Year Cell

3×3×3 m
9 m^2 of floor area.
27 m^3 of volume.

2. The Permanence Hall

Reference dimensional configurations (not definitive):
Compact: approximately 10×10 m in plan and up to approximately 10 m maximum height.
Longitudinal: approximately 20×5 m in plan and approximately 5-10 m maximum height.
Approximate footprint in both cases: 100 m^2.

The project does not propose a great infrastructure, a contemporary cathedral or an oversized monument. It proposes two minimal forms of permanence.

The first is almost absolute: a cube three metres by three metres by three metres. An elementary volume. A chamber. A cell. A bathroom. A minimal archive. A space of silence. A moral core. The question it raises is brutal precisely because of its smallness:

If we cannot even build 27 m^3 to last a thousand years, what does it mean to speak of architectural sustainability?

The second piece is already a real building, but it is not fixed to a single proportion. It may adopt a more compact and almost centred configuration - of the order of 10×10 m in plan and up to 10 m maximum height - especially suitable for surrounding and safeguarding the inner cell; or a more longitudinal configuration - of the order of 20×5 m in plan, with a maximum height between 5 and 10 m - if the character of hall, route and programme is to be emphasized. Both alternatives maintain an approximate footprint of 100 m^2 and must be adjusted to budget, site and structural calculation. Because the envelope is catenary, these dimensions describe the maximum reference box rather than an exact usable prismatic volume. In either variant, the scale is sufficient for the thesis to cease being an image and become architecture.

The relationship between the two pieces is deliberate. The cell formulates the thesis. The hall develops it and may surround, protect and safeguard it as a second architecture. The cell is the absolute minimum. The hall is the civilizational minimum. The cell asks whether we can build something that lasts. The hall asks whether we can organize a life around that duration.

Together they form a system: not an installation, but a constructive principle.

The Thousand-Year Cell: a 3×3×3 m concrete core masked by an exposed straw skin.

4. The straw skin

Straw is the building's first lie.

From outside, the ensemble appears to belong to the world of the provisional: straw, vegetal matter, fragility, decomposition, temporariness, rural economy, poor architecture, almost biodegradable construction. The biennale sees an appearance it recognizes: something light, dismantlable, almost scenographic, apparently ephemeral.

But that reading is false.

Straw is not the truth of the building. It is its critical mask.

Beneath this vegetal skin appears a structure of concrete and stainless steel. Where the exterior promises disappearance, the interior affirms permanence. Where the surface appears to accept the logic of the ephemeral, the core rejects it. The outside performs the obsolescence that the inside resists.

Straw must not function as ecological decoration or picturesque stage dressing. It must perform a real function: solar filter, thermal protection, ventilated cavity, climatic buffer, replaceable skin, compostable or reusable material. Its temporal condition is not a problem because it does not claim to last a thousand years. Straw accepts its own limited duration. What refuses disappearance is the structure.

The building is therefore organized as a temporal hierarchy:

- straw: short duration;
- enclosures and secondary layers: medium duration;
- concrete and stainless-steel structure: long duration;
- form, stewardship and memory: millennial aspiration.

This temporal stratification avoids a confusion: not everything in a building has to last a thousand years in the same way. But there must be a core of permanence that orders the rest. Temporary layers may be replaced, renewed or composted. The structure must remain.

Straw therefore does not contradict the thesis. It intensifies it. It shows that the ephemeral makes sense only when it knows that it is not the foundation. The temporary may protect, shade, wrap or signal. But it must not replace architecture.

5. The permanent structure: concrete and stainless steel

The interior of both buildings is structurally conceived in concrete and stainless steel. Not as a technological gesture, but as a declaration of duration.

Concrete provides mass, inertia, gravity, thickness, resistance, thermal protection and a material presence difficult to reduce to an image. It is not used as a cheap material for short cycles, nor as support for rapid obsolescence, but as matter that can be justified only if it serves for a very long time.

Stainless steel introduces a second dimension: precision, corrosion resistance, repairability, technical continuity and the capacity to remain as articulation, reinforcement, joint, door, hinge, tie, frame or secondary structural element. It is not used to create a shiny or futuristic aesthetic, but to reinforce the idea that details too must aspire to duration.

The combination is deliberate:

concrete for mass;
stainless steel for articulation;
straw for the ephemeral mask;
time to justify everything.

The material paradox becomes clear: the building presents itself as fragile, but is constructed as though it ought to outlive those who look at it. Straw deceives the eye of the biennale. Concrete and stainless steel answer to time.

6. The Thousand-Year Cell

The Thousand-Year Cell is the most radical piece of the project.

At only 3×3×3 metres, it concentrates the entire accusation against ephemeral architecture. It does not need to be large in order to be extreme. On the contrary: the smaller it is, the more difficult it becomes to excuse its failure. The project does not ask civilization to build an eternal city, but whether it can still build one room intended to last for centuries.

The cell, however, need not be understood as an isolated volume.

The 3×3×3 metre piece may be inscribed within a larger second architecture that covers, protects and safeguards it: a building inside another building.

As a working hypothesis, this outer envelope may be of the order of ten metres by ten metres, although its definitive dimension is deliberately left open. It may extend longitudinally if the relationship between the core and its protective building requires it. The exact measure should emerge from later architectural development rather than from an arbitrary numerical decision.

What matters at this stage is not the number but the relationship.

A minimal core.
A larger architecture protecting it.
A first sacrificial envelope facing the outside world.
And, inside, a room intended to approach a thousand years as closely as humanly possible.

The larger building does not reduce the radicality of the cell. It increases it. The Thousand-Year Cell becomes the material sanctum of the work: an inner core defended by successive layers of architecture.

Permanence is therefore no longer understood merely as robustness, but also as depth.

To reach the core, one must pass through architecture.

Externally, the ensemble may continue to present itself as a straw volume: an enlarged agricultural bale, a closed hut, poor construction, provisional architecture. Yet as its layers are crossed, perception changes progressively. Vegetal matter leads toward a heavy and precise structure. Apparent fragility culminates in concrete and stainless steel.

The cell may adopt different uses, all of them elementary:

- chamber of silence;
- essential bathroom;
- foundational archive;
- cell of permanence;
- small climatic refuge;
- dry repository of memory;
- minimal reading room;
- place for safeguarding the foundation element;
- secular oratory of duration.

Its programme must not be spectacular. It must be basic. Even a thousand-year bathroom would have greater conceptual force than many supposedly visionary installations. The challenge would not be to make something large, but something elementary and durable: minimal architecture, useful, maintainable, repairable and not designed for photography as an end in itself.

The Thousand-Year Cell is ultimately a built question:

Can contemporary architecture produce a room that does not ask to be replaced?

Interior visualization: the compact catenary Permanence Hall surrounds and safeguards the smaller straw-masked cell.

7. The Permanence Hall

The Permanence Hall is not defined by one definitive proportion. It is a catenary building with an approximate footprint of 100 m² whose exact geometry must remain open until budget, site, construction logic and structural calculation are known.

Two dimensional families are proposed as references rather than contradictions. A compact option, approximately 10×10 m in plan and up to 10 m high, emphasizes enclosure, centrality and the protection of the inner cell. A longitudinal option, approximately 20×5 m in plan with a height between roughly 5 and 10 m, emphasizes route, section, programme and the character of a hall. The catenary curve means that these figures define an outer dimensional envelope rather than an exact rectangular useful volume.

In either case the scale remains modest, but it allows real architecture: route, section, programme, simultaneous uses, storage, shade, rest, reading, meeting, repair and stewardship.

Externally, the hall is also clad in straw. From outside it may resemble a large agricultural body, a temporary storehouse, poor construction, a vegetal installation or soft architecture. But this first reading is contradicted by entry, thickness, inner mass and the concrete and stainless-steel structure.

The hall is neither an industrial shed nor an exhibition pavilion. It is a structure of long duration. A minimal house of permanence. A building that does not wish to circulate as an image, but to serve as a temporal support for different generations.

Its ideal programme would be hybrid:

- minimal library;
- archive;
- repair workshop;
- school of crafts;
- reading room;
- climatic refuge;
- materials repository;
- community space;
- long-duration house of culture;
- maintenance centre for the architecture itself.

The most coherent combination would be a House of Permanence: library, archive, workshop and minimal school of crafts. A building devoted to preserving knowledge, repairing matter, transmitting techniques, safeguarding memory and training those who will have to maintain it.

The hall would not merely last.

It would teach how to last.

Its programme would coincide with its thesis: preserve, repair, inherit, safeguard.

Its form must be deliberately sober: a clear, almost archaic geometry without unnecessary gestures. Its power will not come from formal extravagance, but from the intensity of its temporal promise. Whether compact or longitudinal, it must be a body that can be understood, measured, repaired and transmitted.

8. Critical context: ephemeral architecture as deferred waste

Ephemeral architecture is often discussed as though temporariness were, in itself, an aesthetic or conceptual virtue. But temporariness is not an automatic virtue. It may be necessary, humble, ritual, reversible or materially innocent. It may also become an alibi for producing expensive objects that are transported, illuminated, documented, photographed and dismantled.

The enemy of this project is not the provisional hut, the emergency shelter, the genuinely useful dismantlable structure or the temporary solution that prevents a greater harm. The enemy is event architecture: corporate pavilions, trade-fair stands, festival installations, cultural scenographies, architecture biennales, late universal-exposition logic, institutional displays, photogenic devices and structures designed to circulate as images before they remain as world.

Much of this architecture is not light; it merely presents itself as light. Behind its apparent subtlety lie material extraction, transport, packaging, specialized assembly, insurance, lighting, climate control, temporary maintenance, visual documentation, dismantling and, often, waste.

It is architecture born already as deferred waste.

Its destiny is not to inhabit time. Its destiny is to produce a season, an opening, a photograph, a dossier, an institutional presence, a brand. Its problem is therefore not merely ecological. It is also moral and aesthetic: it does not build world; it consumes world in order to produce a gesture.

9. The two conditions of legitimacy

This project does not claim that every temporary form is illegitimate. Temporary architectures can make sense. But the threshold of justification must be far higher than is usually assumed.

Ephemeral architecture should exist only if it satisfies one of two conditions.

First condition: material innocence

It must be reusable, biodegradable, reversible, of minimal impact, or built with existing materials in a way that prevents greater harm. In this case its temporariness is justified because it produces no significant material burden or because its materials continue to have a life after the work.

Second condition: extreme symbolic power

It must be so intense, necessary or extraordinary that it deserves not to be ephemeral. In other words, it must fail as ephemeral architecture. It must demonstrate that its disappearance would be a loss.

Everything that meets neither of these conditions belongs more to waste than to art, more to the consumption of forms than to the responsible construction of the world.

10. The failure of the end

Ephemeral architecture has a declared end: to last briefly. Its normal success consists in fulfilling that temporal programme. It is assembled, visited, photographed, dismantled and disappears. But precisely there lies its problem.

If it disappears without loss, if no one feels that the world is diminished by its absence, if its disappearance reveals no error, then perhaps it did not need to be built. It may have fulfilled its end, but that fulfilment does not necessarily justify the means used.

Hence the central paradox:

Ephemeral architecture is justified only when it fails as ephemeral architecture.

Only when what was supposed to disappear proves that it deserved to remain; only when its own ephemerality is defeated by its formal, symbolic, historical or communal force; only when time contradicts the intended temporariness of the work can the means employed be redeemed.

The Eiffel Tower is the extreme example: a work born in an expository and temporary context that became incompatible with its disappearance.

The Barcelona Pavilion by Mies van der Rohe is a more problematic example because it had to be reconstructed after disappearing. Precisely for that reason the lesson should be harsher: it is not enough for something to deserve reconstruction; ideally it should have been conceived so that it never needed to disappear.

The Double Building of Permanence takes this demand and radicalizes it.

It does not want to fail as ephemeral architecture because it refuses to be ephemeral.
It does not want to be remembered because it disappeared.
It does not want to be reconstructed as a ghost.
It does not want to survive only as archive, photograph, myth or quotation.
It wants to exist.

11. Critical relationship with Gensler

The recent precedent of Gensler's 500-Year Building is important because it shows that long duration is again occupying a central place in architectural imagination. That proposal conceived a five-hundred-year building as a living, adaptable, regenerative system open to change and narrated through an immersive installation, digital images, future stories and technological devices.

This project recognizes the importance of that temporal shift: thinking in centuries is better than thinking in immediate consumption cycles. Yet it separates itself radically from its language, method and ontology.

The point is not to oppose “a thousand years” to “five hundred years” as though the difference were mere numerical inflation. The difference is not the number. It lies in the kind of architecture and the kind of relationship with time.

Where Gensler imagines architecture as a living system, this project asserts architecture as permanent form.

Where Gensler proposes adaptability, renewal and transformation, this project proposes rigidity, duration and stewardship.

Where Gensler constructs an immersive installation about permanence, this project proposes an anti-installation against the spectacularization of permanence.

Where Gensler works with imagined futures, this project works with obligation toward the future.

Where Gensler turns long duration into an exhibition experience, this project argues that permanence should not become biennale content: it should become construction.

The criticism is not that Gensler thinks in five hundred years. That is valuable. The criticism is that contemporary architectural culture can absorb even the idea of permanence into the circuit of temporary installation, immersive experience and futuristic imagery.

This project exists against that absorption.

Permanence is not exhibited. It is built.

12. The climatic paradox: perhaps Gensler is right in a broken world

The criticism of Gensler, however, should not be simplistic. There is a deeper paradox.

It is possible that in a future marked by climate change, environmental instability, migration, energy crises, changing uses and radical transformation of material conditions, more adaptable architecture will have a real advantage. A building conceived as a living system, capable of continuous transformation, may respond better to an unpredictable world than a rigid, heavy and permanent building.

It is therefore possible that Gensler is right in a broken world.

But that possibility does not automatically refute this project. On the contrary, it opens its most tragic dimension.

If the future world requires everything to change ceaselessly in order to survive, perhaps we are not witnessing the triumph of adaptability, but the defeat of permanence. Perhaps rigid architecture was not wrong; perhaps humanity has destroyed the conditions that made it reasonable to build for centuries.

When permanence of habitat has no place in the world, there is no longer a world.

If we return to nomadism, we will not only have lost civilization: we will have lost the world in the specifically human sense of the term - a relatively stable place that can be inhabited, transmitted, remembered and inherited.

For long periods, relatively rigid and massive buildings have been able to last five hundred, a thousand or even more years. Temples, bridges, walls, aqueducts, monasteries, cathedrals, stone houses, palaces, streets and entire cities have crossed wars, religious changes, languages, economies, empires, technologies and generations.

This does not mean they were immobile or devoid of life. Many cathedrals took centuries to build, grew by phases and incorporated chapels, towers, repairs and new uses; in that sense they could behave like organisms that continued to grow and adapt after they had begun to exist.

But this living condition did not require constant transformation of their skeleton or continuous dissolution of their formal identity. Aqueducts, bridges, walls and historical buildings were repaired, maintained, extended or partially transformed, sometimes for centuries, without needing to reinvent themselves entirely in every generation.

They could change without ceasing to be what they were. And precisely for that reason they remained.

If we can no longer think in this way, the question should not be merely architectural.

It must be civilizational and planetary:

What have we done so that architecture can no longer promise duration?

13. The project's double paradox

The Double Building of Permanence contains two paradoxes of failure.

The first paradox belongs to the biennale.

The project will succeed only if it fails as an ephemeral biennale project. If it is merely visited, photographed, discussed and forgotten, it will have failed. If it becomes just another installation in the circuit of installations, it will have failed. If it ends when the exhibition closes, it will have failed. If it is exhausted in its visual documentation, it will have failed.

Its first success consists precisely in not fulfilling the normal destiny of the biennale: appear, produce novelty, circulate as image and disappear.

I do not believe in biennales as architecture's ultimate place. A biennale may serve as tribunal, loudspeaker, public record, accusation or beginning of an obligation. But it must not be confused with

architecture itself. Architecture is not consummated in exhibition. It is consummated when it remains, serves, ages, resists, is maintained and obliges different generations to live with the same form.

The second paradox belongs to the future.

If the Double Building of Permanence is built and remains, it will have triumphed as building and as idea. It will have shown that it is still possible to build with a will to extreme duration. It will have confirmed that time can be an essential factor of sustainability.

But if, once built, the building fails because the climatic future has become too unstable to permit permanence, it will fail as a building and triumph as an accusation.

Its ruin will not necessarily refute the thesis.

It may confirm it tragically.

For then the problem will not merely be that one building did not resist. The problem will be that humanity produced a world in which permanence became impossible.

In that case, the building's failure will become the project's success as diagnosis. It will have shown that architecture cannot promise a thousand years because civilization can no longer promise a world.

The project can therefore fail badly, fail well, or fail very badly.

It fails badly

If it is reduced to a biennale installation, a render, a text, a photograph or one more temporary experience.

This is banal failure: obediently fulfilling the normal destiny of what the project criticizes.

It fails well

If it remains.

That is, if it fails in the mission apparently assigned to ephemeral architecture conceived for a biennale. If it was supposed to be temporary and ceases to be so; if it was supposed to disappear and remains; if the event ends but the building does not, it will have failed in its final cause as an ephemeral object and triumphed as architecture.

That failure would be historical.

It fails very badly

If it tries to remain but cannot because the climatic, political, material or civilizational conditions of the future no longer permit permanence.

That failure would be neither banal nor merely architectural.

It would be apocalyptic.

Only the first failure would be banal as a biennale failure.

The second would be historical.

The third would be apocalyptic.

14. Against the adaptable building as contemporary consolation

Adaptability has become an almost unquestioned virtue. We speak of flexible, resilient, reprogrammable, open, mutable, reversible, living buildings. Often this logic makes sense. A building must be repairable, updateable, maintainable and, in certain respects, transformable.

But this project rejects adaptability as the supreme value.

The Double Building of Permanence does not want to be an anxious organism. It does not want to look like an interface. It does not want to present itself as architecture in permanent update. It does not want to justify survival by becoming anything whatsoever.

Its ambition is not to adapt indefinitely to the world, but to impose on the world an obligation of care.

It lasts not because it is indeterminate.

It lasts because it has a form, a presence and a necessity worth maintaining.

This does not mean denying maintenance. On the contrary: a thousand-year building needs a culture of maintenance. But maintenance is not the same as constant mutation.

To repair is not to dissolve.

To care is not to reprogramme without end.

Replacing a roof, restoring a joint, reinforcing a wall, repairing stone or renewing an installation does not turn architecture into flow.

Against liquid, flexible and provisional architecture, this project claims rigidity in the noble sense: architecture with limit, weight, resistance, toughness, memory and character.

15. Time as sustainability

Contemporary sustainability is usually measured through initial impact, embodied emissions, energy efficiency, certifications, circularity, recycling, operational consumption and material traceability.

All of that matters.

But one decisive question is missing:

For how long will that impact remain justified?

Time is not a poetic addition to sustainability. It is one of its central factors.

A work with great material impact may be irresponsible if it lasts briefly, but acquire another logic if it lasts for centuries. A structure of concrete, stone, brick, steel or ceramic should not be justified as a short-cycle object. If heavy materials are used, they must work for a long time. If matter is extracted from the world, that matter should serve many generations.

Sustainability does not consist only in reducing.

It also consists in prolonging.

Not only in spending less, but in making what is spent meaningful for longer.

The Double Building of Permanence proposes a temporal accounting of architecture. It does not ask only how much carbon, energy or matter is used. It asks for how many years that matter will prevent new construction, new demolition, new waste and new replacement.

A thirty-year building may be ecologically false even if it carries a green discourse.

A five-hundred-year building may be ecologically serious even if it is heavy, if its weight becomes permanence.

16. Constructive principles

The Double Building of Permanence is not a futuristic fantasy. It does not want to look like science fiction. It does not want to dazzle with an image of the future. It wants to formulate the conditions of construction capable of enduring.

Its design must begin from an elementary question:

What form, matter, structure, institution and community could allow two minimal buildings to last more than five hundred years and aspire to a thousand?

The project must respond to nine principles.

1. Structural permanence

The main structure must be massive, clear, reasonably oversized, repairable and legible. It must avoid dependence on fragile systems, proprietary components or solutions that make future maintenance impossible.

2. Formal rigidity

The form must be strong enough not to depend on fashion. It should not be a generational image, a parametric gesture or a formal extravagance destined to age badly. It should aspire to an elementary presence: wall, shadow, proportion, courtyard, roof, threshold, thickness, orientation, gravity.

3. Materials that can age

Materials must be able to age without becoming waste. Patina must be part of the building's life. Well-used concrete, stainless steel, stone, brick, ceramic, lime, durable timber and replaceable vegetal skins can belong to this logic if each is used according to its own time.

4. Temporal stratification

Not all layers must last equally long. Straw may last briefly. Installations may last decades. Some enclosures may last generations. The structure must aspire to centuries. Form must aspire to a thousand years.

Responsible architecture does not confuse these scales: it orders them.

5. Repairability

The building must be repairable by future generations. Its systems must be understandable. Its joints must be accessible. Its pathologies must be diagnosable.

Millennial architecture cannot depend on technical tricks incomprehensible to those who inherit it.

6. Low technological dependence

Technology may exist, but it must not be the heart of the building. Installations must be replaceable without destroying the structure. The building must retain value even when its technical systems become obsolete.

Ultimately, the aim is to generate artificial caves prepared for the human being of the third millennium: elementary spaces of protection whose habitability does not depend on the intact survival of the technology of the generation that built them.

The aim is not to return to the cave.

It is to recover its elementary principle - protection, mass, stability, shelter - and project it into the third millennium.

7. Sacrificial skin

The outer straw must be replaceable, compostable, reusable or renewable. It must not pretend to possess a duration it does not have. Its truth lies in accepting its brief time and, precisely because of that, revealing the difference between temporary layer and permanent core.

8. Legal stewardship

No building lasts a thousand years because of matter alone.

It lasts because someone cares for it.

The project must include a form of stewardship: foundation, community, institution, board, easement, future heritage protection, construction archive, maintenance rules and limits against arbitrary demolition.

9. Persistent necessity

The programme must answer to a human need resistant to time. It must not depend on a commercial or technological fashion. It should serve functions capable of retaining meaning across generations: preserve, teach, repair, gather, shelter, transmit.

View from within the concrete cell: a deliberately austere, low-tech interior framed by stainless-steel elements and the surrounding straw envelope.

17. The exhibition as anti-installation

Presentation at a biennale or festival must be strictly coherent with the criticism. It cannot produce a spectacular installation about permanence that later becomes waste.

The exhibition must be an anti-installation.

There will be no immersive experience.

There will be no scenography of sustainability.

There will be no screens at the centre of the project.

There will be no artificial intelligence generating imagined futures.

There will be no objects produced in order to be discarded.

There will be no temporary pavilion speaking about long duration while confirming the logic of the ephemeral.

The exhibition may consist of:

- a manifesto;
- a plan;

- a construction section;
- an austere model;
- a foundation element;
- a wall fragment;
- a straw sample;
- a concrete sample;
- a stainless-steel piece;
- a materials catalogue;
- a duration calculation;
- a maintenance protocol;
- a draft legal statute;
- a preliminary budget;
- a construction chronology;
- an archive of irreversible decisions.

Every exhibited element must satisfy one rule: be reused, returned, incorporated into the future building, composted or produced with minimal impact.

The exhibition must not look like a finished work.

It must look like a commitment already begun.

18. Exhibition device

The exhibition will be organized as a trial.

Room 1: The accusation

Main text:

“Much ephemeral architecture is born already as deferred waste.”

Typologies of event architecture will be shown: pavilions, fairs, stands, biennales, installations, photogenic devices and institutional displays. The aim will not be to attack individual works, but to reveal a general logic: produce, photograph, dismantle, replace.

Room 2: The thesis - formal cause and failure of the final cause

Main text:

“Only the failure of the end justifies the means.”

Here the formal paradox will be explained. If the apparent final cause of ephemeral biennale architecture is to appear, produce an event, be contemplated for a determined period and finally disappear, only the failure of that final cause can fully justify the means consumed.

The project therefore introduces a deliberately Aristotelian reading of the paradox.

A good biennale project of this kind would be one in which the success of the formal cause produces the failure of the final cause.

The form would have to attain such necessity, intensity, beauty, utility or significance that the temporal destiny initially assigned to it became unacceptable.

The formal cause triumphs when it makes the ephemeral purpose fail.

The Eiffel Tower is the extreme example: form ultimately rebelled against the temporariness of the event that had produced it.

The Mies Pavilion presents the same paradox in a more problematic form: its later recognition revealed that disappearance had been a mistake, to the point of demanding reconstruction.

A true biennale success, in this sense, would be to produce something too good to disappear with the biennale itself.

Room 3: The precedent and the divergence

Main text:

“A thousand-year building is not an immersive experience.”

Here the 500-Year Building by Gensler will be addressed critically. Not as a personal attack, but as a conceptual contrast. Gensler represents permanence understood as adaptability, narration and experience. This project represents permanence understood as rigidity, construction, stewardship and obligation.

Room 4: The double scale

Main text:

“Twenty-seven cubic metres and roughly one hundred square metres against obsolescence.”

Here the two pieces are presented: the Thousand-Year Cell and the Permanence Hall. The first is the absolute minimum; the second is the civilizational minimum. One is the moral core; the other is its architectural development.

The possibility of placing the 3×3×3 metre cell inside a larger protective building will also be shown, establishing a sequence of permanence through layers.

Room 5: The straw mask

Main text:

“The building is not ephemeral: it only wears the mask of the ephemeral.”

Here the material novelty of the project is explained. The outer straw makes the ensemble appear fragile, temporary, agrarian, almost disposable. But the concrete and stainless-steel interior reveals the true thesis: a structure designed to last beneath a skin that accepts disappearance.

Room 6: The climatic paradox - final cause

Main text:

“If only the adaptable survives, perhaps what has failed is not permanent architecture, but the world.”

This room introduces final cause at its most radical scale.

Why do we build?

Why should architecture last?

What does it mean if a future world makes that purpose impossible?

The impossibility of fulfilling the final cause of permanence would no longer be a merely technical failure. It could become the material diagnosis of a civilizational and planetary failure.

Room 7: The commitment

Main text:

“This does not end when the biennale closes.”

The real project will be presented: possible site, programme, materials, drawings, maintenance rules, legal structure and calendar. The biennale must become subordinate to something that comes after it.

Room 8: The stone - material cause

(Material cause)

A single piece of concrete intended for the future building.

Not a metaphor.
Not an exhibition object.
A real part of the construction.

The piece does not represent the building.

The piece begins the building.

19. Expected outcome

The outcome of participation will not be a dismantled installation. Participation makes sense only if it produces consequences afterward.

Possible outcomes:

1. Creation of a stewardship entity.
2. Selection of a site.
3. Development of a preliminary design.
4. First real budget.
5. Public archive of the project.
6. Publication of the manifesto.
7. Incorporation of exhibited materials into the future building.
8. Composting or reuse of the outer straw.
9. Creation of a community of patrons, technicians, builders and stewards.
10. Launch of a funding campaign.
11. Drafting of an intergenerational maintenance charter.

The biennale must not be the end of the project.

It must be the place where the project can no longer remain only an idea.

20. Criteria of success and failure

This project will not measure success by visitor numbers, media impact, published photographs or circulation on social networks. Those indicators belong to the logic being criticized.

Its criteria of success will be different:

- that the project not be exhausted in the exhibition;
- that it produce obligation;
- that it advance toward construction;
- that exhibited materials not become waste;
- that the straw be reused, composted or returned to the material cycle;
- that the cell come into existence;
- that the hall come into existence;
- that both remain;
- that both be maintained;
- that they survive different generations;
- that they make time visible as a dimension of sustainability.

There are also different kinds of failure.

Operational failure

The project fails to be built.

This is the immediate failure of passing from idea to matter.

Banal failure

The project becomes just another biennale installation.

It is observed, photographed, published and finally dismantled without altering the temporal destiny it criticized.

Historical failure

It fails precisely in its task as an ephemeral project - that is, in being temporary - and remains.

What was supposed to belong to the event begins to belong to time.

Architecture disobeys the temporariness of the exhibition because the quality or necessity of its form makes disappearance unjustifiable.

That failure would in fact be one of the highest forms of success.

Noble failure

It attempts to be built and to remain and, even without completely reaching the desired duration, reveals the material, legal, economic, institutional and cultural difficulties of building for centuries.

Apocalyptic failure

The building, once constructed, cannot last because the world produced by humanity no longer permits permanence.

That final failure would also be an extreme form of conceptual success.

Not because ruin is desirable, but because it would demonstrate that the problem was no longer merely architectural.

It was civilizational and planetary.

An apocalyptic catastrophe.

21. Philosophical dimension

In the human construction of the world, Parmenides must be the objective, even while knowing with Heraclitus that the world changes.

The surface of reality is Heraclitean: flow, transformation, erosion, time, wear, replacement.

Precisely for that reason architecture must aspire to a Parmenidean permanence.

Not because it can absolutely defeat becoming, but because its highest function is to introduce duration, stability and presence where everything tends to pass away.

The world changes. Architecture responds by trying to remain and to protect us from exposure to the elements. It helps us dwell amid chaos.

Exposure is the natural state.

Shelter is a human construction.

Architecture stands between them.

The outer straw accepts becoming. Concrete and stainless steel resist it. Architecture appears in the tension between the two: not by denying that everything changes, but by refusing to turn change into an alibi for voluntary disappearance.

This project does not deny change.

It takes change more seriously than ephemeral architecture does.

Precisely because everything will disappear one day, we should not turn voluntary disappearance into an aesthetic virtue.

Precisely because the world is finite, we should build as though things ought to last.

22. Final declaration

This project is presented at an architecture biennale against the habitual logic of architecture biennales.

It does not propose an ephemeral installation about permanence.

It does not propose an immersive experience about the future.

It does not propose adaptable architecture that dissolves into change.

It does not propose a pavilion destined to disappear after having spoken about sustainability.

It proposes two minimal and complementary buildings: a 27 m^3 cell and a catenary Permanence Hall with an approximate footprint of 100 m^2, whose final proportion - compact or longitudinal - will be adapted to budget, site and structural development.

It proposes that the minimal cell may be protected inside a larger architecture, turning permanence into a question of depth and layers.

It proposes a straw skin over a concrete and stainless-steel structure.

It proposes architecture that looks ephemeral in order to reveal that it is not.

It proposes rigid, durable, material, repairable, safeguarded and morally uncomfortable architecture.

It proposes a building that does not want to be novelty.

It proposes a building that does not want to circulate as image.

It proposes a building that does not want to return to a biennale.

It proposes a building that will succeed only if it ceases to belong to the biennale and begins to belong to time.

Perhaps the future will prove adaptable architecture right.

Perhaps in a climatically unstable world only what changes ceaselessly will survive.

But if that happens, this project will not simply have been refuted.

It will have formulated a deeper accusation: humanity will have created a world in which even permanence becomes unviable.

The Double Building of Permanence does not seek to deny disaster by adapting docilely to it.

It seeks to ask whether we are still capable of building against disaster.

It seeks to affirm that time is not a secondary enemy of architecture, but its highest test.

It seeks to remind us that sustainability consists not only in consuming less, but in making what is built deserve to last.

And it seeks to sustain one elementary demand:

A civilization worthy of that name should still be capable of building something intended to last a thousand years.

Even if it is only 27 m^3.

Even if the hall has a footprint of barely about 100 m^2.

Even if from outside it looks like straw.

If it cannot, it will not only be one building that has failed.

We will have failed.

And here appears the final paradox.

If the project fails as ephemeral biennale architecture because it succeeds in remaining, and triumphs as a perennial material idea, then precisely by failing in the temporal destiny the biennale seemed to impose on it, it will also have triumphed as a biennale project.

The best biennale would be one capable of producing a work that no longer needed to return to a biennale.

The success of the formal cause will have produced the failure of the ephemeral final cause.

And that failure will, finally, be its success.